

'A NEW STRANGER HAS COME'

over the age of ten had to avoid the hut and its inhabitants altogether. The husband slept either in the boys' dormitory or with the husband of the woman who was looking after his wife. 846
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This ritual uncleanness extended to any food once it was carried into the hut. Ngoni women used to demonstrate their love for their husbands by stopping cooked food being carried into the hut, and sending it instead by the child who brought it to her husband where the men were gathered at the gate of the kraal. [599]

Ritual cleansing of a hut and its occupants took place in stages. At the time of 'bringing out the child', which I shall shortly describe, the hut itself was made clean again. It was thoroughly swept, and the floor and veranda were smeared with cowdung. Cowdung was used habitually for smearing on floors, prior to polishing them with a smooth stone. But fresh wet cowdung rubbed on the hands was also used for ritual cleansing after some 'dangerous' act such as touching sacred objects or administering the royal medicines. In the case of its use after childbirth it was undoubtedly used in the ritual sense, for the operation was called 'making the hut safe for the husband to sleep in'. The household goods were then put back in their places, anyone could go into the hut, and the husband returned to sleep there, though on a separate mat on his, the right-hand side, of the fireplace. If the child was a first baby, the husband's return to sleep in the hut was delayed, since the senior women stayed on to instruct the young mother how to take care of the baby at night, and especially how to be careful not to smother it as it lay beside her on her mat. [237]

'Coming out of the hut'

The falling of the cord was the signal that the baby was ready to 'come out of the hut' and be presented to the village. Ngoni women used to hasten the falling of the cord by burning a maize cob, and squeezing into the ashes the juice of the 846
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851 small bitter thorn apple and mixing in castor oil. This was
 [842] applied with a feather to the baby's navel.

• [278] When the cord dropped the baby's head was shaved, and
 [302] the mother shaved a little hair round her temples. Then
 [515] they washed carefully, using sweet-smelling soapy leaves,
 oiled the baby's skin, put on clean clothes, and came out of
 the hut door and sat on a clean mat outside. This first public
 coming out of the hut took place in the late afternoon, so
 that the men, after their work was finished, could come to
 'salute the new stranger'. The husband and his brothers
 were the first to come, and this was the first time he had seen
 the baby. They brought small presents such as a fowl or a
 [431] basket of flour, and always strings of beads which were tied
 round the baby's wrists and ankles, neck and waist. The
 word used for these little gifts was 'to give a present just for
 pleasing', and Ngoni Christians when speaking of such
 [177] presents to new babies likened them to the gifts brought by
 the Magi to the infant Christ.

While the husband and his immediate kinsmen came to
 greet the baby at the hut door, the senior men of the village
 stayed by the gate of the kraal. After the cattle had come
 [554] back that evening and the kraal gates were shut, the grand-
 [603] mother carried the baby to the gate and presented him to
 [431] the senior men who responded by giving small presents to
 the child. This was always done if the baby was a boy, but
 sometimes omitted for girls.

864 When small children seeing the new baby on its mother's
 lap asked where it came from, they were always told that
 the mother had found it by the river in the rushes on the
 bank. The object of this reply, so Ngoni women said, was to
 hide the secret of birth from the children and stop them
 asking further questions. The Ngoni culture pattern of child-
 hood innocence required that children should be kept in
 ignorance of birth and sexual intercourse while they were
 young. By adults therefore they were put off with stories of
 finding the baby on the river bank. As usual, however, in

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When the boy's voice began to break, and his father or another older man noticed it, the second part of the ritual took place. The father's brother went to a senior man famed in the village as a herbalist and obtained from him several kinds of roots. These were ground and then cooked either in milk or in the cud from a goat's stomach, usually the latter, for the father liked it to be known that he killed a goat for his son. If the mixture was cooked in milk, a fowl was killed, and in either case the boy was given the meat to eat immediately after the mixture to take away the extremely bitter taste. The cooking took place on a small fire by the kraal gate in the presence of the male members of the father's house. The boy was told to dip the tips of his fingers in the mixture as it was bubbling in the pan and to lick them quickly. He was not expected to show that he found the mixture very bitter as well as hot to touch. At intervals the boy had to jump over the fire, hitting his elbows and knees with the palms of his hands. The more often he did this, the less often did he have to dip in the pan because the mixture soon dried up, but he had to continue dipping and licking till there was no liquid left. The senior men watched intently all through this performance because they believed the mixture not only helped physical growth and muscular strength but would prevent impotence. When this ritual was performed for the heir of a chief, it was followed by a war-dance in the cattle kraal and the boy had to take a second dose of medicine in the kraal surrounded by the warriors. In such a case a bull was killed instead of the customary goat, and the contents of its stomach used for mixing the medicine. The meat was eaten by the boy and his father's relatives.

As in the case of the girls, this boy's ritual was an occasion for asserting the authority of the father and his kin over the boy. For him there was however no separating off into another group after this maturing. He continued to live in the dormitory, herd cattle, and go to school as before.

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231 severed portions. On branches of fresh leaves, brought by the
561 younger herd-boys, were piled the sections of the animal,
down to the last bit of intestine, for distribution according to
a fixed Ngoni pattern.

231 A senior man of the house owning the beast, when all was
825 ready, 'counted' all the parts, that is he named each part,
head, horns, tail, feet, joints and internal organs, and each
[868] was pointed out to him as being present. The herd-boys stand-
ing round learned the names of the organs and the sections
of the animal, and heard the names and status of the men to
whom the parts were assigned. The herd-boys of the family
of the owner were given certain symbolic parts: an ear, an
eye and the nose, for hearing, seeing and smelling; parts of
an artery and of an intestine as controlling the blood flow and
the waste material, and the rectum as ejecting waste; and
the foot for walking steadily and fast.

252 Some of the meat was roasted over a fire, parts like the
[251] stomach and intestines were cleaned and boiled, some was
dried slowly on a rack over a fire of green wood, and put in
fibre bags for keeping. The blood was taken to the head
woman of the house owning the herd. She cooked it with
the fat round the kidneys till it coagulated and formed a
dish, salty and meaty, much liked by the Ngoni, and
rather akin to black pudding. The women also took over
any spare fat and rendered it down and clarified it to use as
[278] unguents.

233 The young adult who had had six or seven years of
868 herding cattle and had advanced to be a senior herd-boy,
had acquired not only certain manual skills such as those
just described, but also some knowledge of the anatomy of
cattle, some idea of the social attitudes towards cattle and
their ownership, and some idea of their economic value to
the Ngoni. For certain restricted ritual purposes, a cow in
calf had to be killed for sacrifice, and herd-boys saw the foetus
removed when the cow was cut up. They were also often
present at the birth of calves in the bush, and had to wait

varying success in their other aims. The number of people with dozens of wives has decreased to zero, but this has been due to the operation of other factors as well as pressure from the missions. Whether the incidence of polygyny as a whole, that is the ratio of monogamist to polygynist men, has decreased is difficult to assess, since genealogical information is incomplete on barren wives and the wives of men whose descendants are now scattered. The fact that only six per cent of widows are inherited is due to the general change in the nature of marriage, the decline in the incidence of bridewealth, and the changed significance of residence, as well as to Christian endeavour. In these matters the general flow of events has been on the side of the missions. The same cannot be said for premarital copulation and for the ritual of 'taking up the child'. Censure from the mission is an additional hazard to be avoided in premarital intercourse, but it has not prevented it. In their opposition to the belief in *mdulo* and the ritual intercourse which follows as a consequence of the belief, the missions are aided by the teaching of hygiene and Western science in the schools, but there is no support from indigenous values. In this matter it is difficult to establish any trend, but the way in which attitudes are changing towards traditional mystical sanctions seems to be that the operation of the sanction is still believed in, but that the techniques for counteracting the sanction have been added to, so that the powerful medicines of Western civilization, particularly the sulphonamides, can be used to counteract the machinations of sorcerers. It does not seem likely that the belief in *mdulo* will disappear easily.

Thus in the system of values sustaining marriage, we find that there is some inconsistency. The teaching of the missions, the values associated with the old Ngoni way of life; and those deriving from the matrilineal tribes of the region conflict with one another on some points and support each other at others. The situations of the present day provide for considerable freedom of choice within these conflicting traditions, so that in one situation a man may adhere to the mission teaching in condemning the bigamy of another man in his village, and in another situation take part in the marriage negotiations for an additional wife for his chief, in accordance with the old Ngoni system of values. A man condones the secret lovers of his unmarried daughter, but when she becomes pregnant brings them to court with the approval of the mission.

6. The transfer of rights

The rights transferred from one group to the other by marriage payments in the old system were clearly defined. By the payment of 'snuff-box' the man's patrilineal kin group acquired rights in *usworo* in the woman, and by the bridewealth they acquired rights in *gondritsem*.⁴ If the woman committed adultery after 'snuff-box'

⁴ I have taken these terms from the interesting paper by Mrs. Schanzen on 'Dahomean marriage: a revaluation', *Africa*, xix (1949), p. 278 to indicate rights in a woman as wife and as mother respectively.

844 If a female child, " You have seen a basket." Then the man comes and sits down on the verandah and makes fire. The old fire in the hut is thrown away. The old woman takes up the new fire and kindles with it a new fire in the hut. The husband goes away to another hut. He does not now cohabit with any of his other wives until his wife, who was confined, is seen again in public.

[84] II. When they know the umbilical cord is going to break, when they set the infant on the knees (legs), they lay it on its side so that when the cord breaks it will fall on one side; for if it breaks and falls on the pubes the child will be impotent, or barren. The umbilical cord they bury on the verandah. That day is the one on which they shave the mother and child. They begin with the infant and they shave the mother. On shaving the infant's head they leave a little hair on the fontanel, and [61] should the infant be of the clan Maseko, they also leave a little patch on the back of the head, and 553 then his godmother gives the child a name, saying,

" My grandchild's name is so and so." This name it will have until such time as it begins to laugh and notice people, then the father, should he wish, will give the child another name. When it grows up still farther it will give itself a name, saying, " Now I am so and so." When the child becomes a man he will once again discard his old name and take another. And if a person calls him by the old name, he says, " He has named me by that thing the wild bush-pigs unearth while digging with their tusks " [meaning something very old]. When they have finished the shaving, the child's grandmother powders some medicine called *pfandabwo*, this she mixes with castor oil and red clay, and then rubs on the fontanel. This medicine they continually renew. When the infant gets strong and big they stop. The

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reason they put on this medicine is that they fear the sun lest it strike through the skull. They also take a purgative medicine called *chiruru*, and pour a decoction in a gourd used for cooking the infant's gruel. The gruel is left off once the child gets strong.

III. Now they prepare to steam the infant. They get the roots of the *Nyalinse* tree and the leaves of the *Chipunganyuny*, and put them in a pot of water, and get four large white pebbles, and put them in the fire, and when they are red hot, lift them out between two pieces of stick, and drop them into the pot, and the steam envelops the infant. They do this because they fear a disease called *Tsempo* and *Mauka*. This done, the floor of the hut is replastered [with dung], and they set fire to every thing that was left in the hut—baskets, potsherds, and spoons. The fire in the hollow in the centre of the floor, they rake up on the floor level, and remove the ashes only, but when they come to fasten the *mkuzi* belt round the infant's waist, the fire is completely extinguished, and rekindled from that of some other hut. Then the husband comes and stands upright near the doorway, and little cuts are made on his leg. They begin with his big toe, and cut four little slashes, and four on his shin, and four on his knee, both sides, and do the same on the other leg, and on his chest are cut two little gashes, and on his back two. Into these cuts is rubbed some medicine for a disease called *Chinyalo*. When they do this they fear, should the man step over the spot on the verandah where the umbilical cord and after-birth are buried, he might take this disease of the legs (*Chinyalo*). If the man have another wife it is she who twists the belt made from the bark of the *Mpoza* tree and places it underneath the mat where she and her husband sleep. Next morning